

Why high-tech startup Kenzen is banking on KC

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Kenzen's predictive body heat sensor system for industrial workers is worn on the upper arm and alerts workers when their body temperatures are approaching unsafe levels.

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IN THIS ARTICLE

Biotech

Topic

Career & Workplace

Industry

Health Care

Industry

Heidi Lehmann

Person

Medical Devices

Topic

Startups

Topic

Technology

Industry

Venture capital

Topic

Tech startup Kenzen is relishing an industry honor: being named as Product of the Year by *Occupational Health & Safety* magazine earlier this month.

The honor offers another point of validation for Kenzen, which has raised \$9 million since launching in 2014. The award is especially meaningful because Kenzen recently redesigned its predictive body heat sensor system for industrial workers.

"We've had phenomenal success (with our pilots this summer), which has been gratifying because it's always a bit of holding your breath and being like, 'Is this going to work?' And it did. So far, we feel like we're tackling a big problem," Kenzen co-founder [Heidi Lehmann](#) told the *Kansas City Business Journal*.



Heidi Lehmann is co-founder of Kenzen, which has a dual headquarters in New York and Kansas City.

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Kenzen has a dual headquarters in New York and Kansas City. Its cloud-based software-as-a-service offering includes a device that workers wear on their upper arm to monitor physiological changes. The device now is waterproof and ruggedized, and it features intrinsic safety – a protection technique to ensure safe operation amid hazardous work areas.

The smart device monitors aspects such as heart rate, activity, ambient temperature and micro climate temperature (the temperature between one's skin and clothing). The sensor uses the real-time data to predict core body temperature and sends alerts and recommendations, such as seeking shade or drinking water, to workers and supervisors when temperatures approach unsafe levels.

Kenzen's goal is preventing heat-related injuries and deaths. In the future, the startup plans to expand its offering to include detection for things such as illness and fatigue.

For Kenzen, building a headquarters hub in Kansas City stretches well beyond a lower cost of living. If that were the only factor, it wouldn't have chosen Kansas City, said Lehmann, whose life partner introduced her to the city.

Kenzen has found a supportive venture capital community in Kansas City and successfully raised funding locally in 2016 and 2019, she said. The startup's Kansas City headquarters is based inside the office of one of its local investors, Royal Street Ventures.

"Building a base here is something that's always been a big goal of mine," the Boston native said. "Personally, I'm very excited to be in a community like Kansas City, which is on the rise and really taking off now in unprecedented ways."

More venture capital funds have taken root in Kansas City, and the community is filled with corporations that are lending resources to the startup community, she said. Kansas City also is starting to see sizable exits, such as Zoloz (formerly EyeVerify), and area universities have fostered a solid research-and-development hub.

Other perks include a concentration of prospective clients and access to a top-notch talent base, thanks to companies such as Cerner Corp., Garmin Ltd. and the former Sprint Corp., Lehmann said.

Kenzen employs 10, including three in Kansas City. In the future, however, Lehmann foresees the Kansas City office outpacing New York's head count because of the local talent base.

Another reason to plant roots in Kansas City: Kenzen wants to be another local success story and be surrounded by other local companies that aim to have a global impact.

"I wanted to be part of building something that I feel has so much potential, and that story has been told in New York and Boston and Silicon Valley already," she said. "I just feel like Kansas City is on the precipice of something that could be really extraordinary and really impactful and influential on a level that goes beyond just Kansas City, goes beyond just the U.S., but could be a global impact. Certainly, what we're doing has that, and I know a lot of other companies have that fuel in them as well."